Idaho Public Utilities Commission
Case No. AVU-E-13-07, Order No. 32888
November 1, 2013
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PUC taking comments on Avista growth plan

Avista Utilities, which serves about 125,000 electric customers in northern Idaho, claims that reduced load-growth projections will delay the need for a natural-gas fired plant by one year and eliminate the need for one of two natural gas plants that were projected for 2023.

The Idaho Public Utilities Commission is taking comment through Nov. 13 on Avista's 20-year growth plan, called an Integrated Resources Plan. The commission requires regulated electric and gas utilities to file plans every two years outlining how they anticipate meeting load-growth in the most cost-effective manner.

In 2011, the company projected annual load growth of about 1.6 percent, but the 2013 plan adjusts annual load growth downward to slightly more than 1 percent. Avista's plan says its own generation and its long-term contracts will provide enough energy to meet customer needs until 2020. The company may be short during peak winter periods in 2014-15 and 2015-16 but plans to meet those needs with market purchases. A long-term capacity deficit does not happen until 2020.

To address that deficit, the company's plan calls for the addition of an 83-MW simple-cycle[i] combustion turbine natural gas plant in 2019. Beyond 2020, the plan calls for another 83-MW simple-cycle CT in 2023 and a 270-MW combined-cycle CT in 2026. Another simple-cycle natural gas plant of 50 MW is anticipated for 2032.

Energy efficiency programs decrease Avista's energy requirements by 125 average megawatts and that is expected to increase to 164 aMW by 2033. Absent energy efficiency programs, Avista would be resource-deficient earlier than 2020.

The 2013 plan removes a 35-aMW wind resource that was included in the 2011 plan. A 30-year power purchase agreement with the eastern Washington Palouse Wind Project in December 2012 (40 aMW) and changes in Washington state law eliminated the need for the 2019-20 wind addition.

For the first time since Avista's 2007 plan, costs related to greenhouse gas emissions have been removed. "Based on current legislative priorities and the President's Climate Action Plan, a national greenhouse gas cap-and-trade system or tax is no longer likely," the plan's executive summary states. Instead, the IRP forecasts some plant retirements to meet new environmental rules promulgated by state and federal agencies. Avista's thermal resources include five natural gas plants, a wood-waste biomass facility, and 111 MW from part ownership of two units of the Colstrip coal plant in eastern Montana.

Avista gets about half of its generation from hydroelectric plants, 33 percent from natural gas, 9 percent from coal, 5 percent from power purchases and 2 percent each from wind and biomass.

Comments on Avista's plan are accepted through Nov. 13 via e-mail by accessing the commission's homepage at www.puc.idaho.gov and clicking on "Case Comment or Question Form," under the "Consumers" heading. Fill in the case number (AVU-E-13-07) and enter your comments. Comments can also be mailed to P.O. Box 83720, Boise, ID 83720-0074 or faxed to (208) 334-3762.

A copy of Avista's plan and other documents related to this case are available on the commission's Web site. Click on "Open Cases" under the "Electric" heading and scroll down to the above case number.

[i] A simple-cycle turbine is an engine that pumps air for combustion. The compressed air is mixed with natural gas and burned to produce electricity. A combined-cycle combustion turbine increases the efficiency of an electric generating unit by capturing its waste heat for use by a steam turbine to produce electricity.